



# Buckinghamshire Council Adoption Service

# References and Checks Post Approval Policy - including Annual Review of Approval inclusive of Early Permanence

# (where applicable)

# Scope of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to address issues that may arise if no further checks and references update occur once an adopter is approved to adopt. This is following the recommendations of the serious case review of [Cumbria LCSPR Report - Leiland-James Michael Corkill](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/537/6683/6687/38391/38392/4476910925.pdf) (L-J C) addressing the failings where further checks and references are not undertaken where there is a gap between approval of adopters and match with a child.

# Legislation and Guidance:

Statutory guidance on adoption (2013) notably chapter 3 Preparing, assessing and approving prospective adopters

Chapter 4 Matching and proposing a placement [DFE stat guidance template (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption_statutory_guidance_2013.pdf)

National Minimum standards (2014) [Department for Education (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf) notably standards 4 Safeguarding children, 10 recruiting and assessing prospective adopters, 13 matching and placing the child.

Notable acts in law Children Act (1989) and Adoption and Children Act (2002).

Buckinghamshire Council Procedures <https://www.proceduresonline.com/buckinghamshire/chservices/>

## Responsibility

All those who have line management responsibility for staff, including assessing social workers, adoption social workers who assess and support adopters, will ensure that the procedure is shared and acted upon.

The procedure will be shared with The Adoption Panel, Agency Adviser and Agency Decision Maker.

# Review of current checks and references

It was clear from this serious case review that statutory references, and checks need to be updated more regularly than current practice has been. Each area is reviewed in turn below and timescales noted as to when a review check/reference is required within each annual review or outside of this. If outside of the annual review schedule it is to be recorded on the Addendum to PAR document.

Letters sent for statutory checks and references to be amended to include a request that if any change to their check or reference becomes known outside of us requesting a check, the agency should contact the adoption team to ascertain if the prospective adopter or adopter is still approved or seeking approval to adopt and if yes then share any other information relevant to their application to adopt or continued approval to adopt.

The adoption team will share the process of updates on references and checks for adopters post approval at the start of their adoption journey with us and throughout.

## Statutory Checks

* **DBS**

The need for DBS updates at 2 years remains in place but these should be completed earlier where a change to offending history is known. The DBS update service can utilised and should be signed up to when first DBS check occurs. If an update is completed outside of an annual review this information can be added to the Addendum to PAR document.

* **Medicals**

The need for medical updates at 2 years remains in place but these should be completed earlier where a change to health is known. If outside of an annual review this information can be added to the Addendum to PAR document. This is taken further as a national recommendation below in the first point.

***National recommendation:***

***The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to ask the Department for Education to review adoption guidance considering the learning from this review. Revised guidance should include:***

***• the need for all health information for adopters and children in the family to be updated and reconsidered at key points in the case, such as at matching, at Child Looked After Reviews and when an adoption application is made***

***• seeking assurance that medical assessments do not rely on the self-report of the prospective adopters***

***• the need for flags to be placed on the GP records for prospective adopters/adopters***

The latter will require further guidance being issued nationally to implement.

For any counselling accessed or other privately sourced medical appointment or intervention, requests will be made to seek references and detail for any previously accessed.

This was noted in the recommendations to the Local Authority as a local recommendation and as Learning.

If a prospective adopter has had contact with a service providing mental health support or counselling, consideration should always be given to requesting consent to contact the agency during the assessment to request information.

Those providing therapeutic interventions to the parents of children should consider the impact on a child of what is reported, and clear information should be shared with the GP about reported alcohol consumption.

* **Finance**

Documents are required to be viewed to corroborate incomings and outgoings plus savings for every approval. Finance form should be updated so accuracy of information is correct and if concerns arise of vulnerability here the Social Worker should consider whether an additional check is required. If self-employed a review check should be done with their accountant each year. See finance policy in Buckinghamshire Childrens Procedure Manual online.

These should be reviewed at each annual review or as new information becomes known outside of this. If outside of the annual review this information can be added to Addendum to PAR document. If last check was over 6 months and a matching panel has been booked, then an update should be conducted prior to attending matching panel.

***The below was made as a National recommendation:***

***• the need for financial information, including the total of any debts, to be robustly assessed during any assessment of prospective adopters.***

* **Employer**

These will have been done as part of the approval process and earlier in stage 1 if they work with vulnerable children or adults or have done so previously. These need to be reviewed every year, consideration will be given if needed under a year but if there is a change of employment then a new reference will be sought and added to Addendum to PAR document. If new information is known, then this may be another reason for another employer check.

If self-employed a review check can be done with same or new supplier or service user.

In the SCR it notes that one prospective adopter had been on furlough during the pandemic and had not advised the workers of this at the time. Whilst furlough may not occur again there may be other issues not shared by adopters e.g. disciplinary.

* **Voluntary work with children or vulnerable adults**

These will have been done as part of the approval process and if this voluntary work has ceased there is no need for a further review as no new information will be gained. However, if this has continued this needs to be reviewed every year. If a new voluntary position has started post approval to gain more experience with children, then a check must be completed for this once enough sessions have been undertaken for the voluntary setting to provide a meaningful response but certainly before any matching panel is attended. or as new information becomes known outside of this. If outside of the annual review this information can be added to Addendum to PAR document.

* **Social media**

These will have been done as part of the approval process and need to be reviewed every year or sooner as new information becomes known outside of this. If outside of the annual review this information can be added to Addendum to PAR document. See social media policy in Buckinghamshire Childrens Procedure Manual online.

* **Local Authority checks**

This should be reviewed every year; if adopter is a Buckinghamshire resident we would be notified by Children’s SW if any referral is made as we would be listed as a worker and team for the child’s parent on our record system LCS. If not a resident in Buckinghamshire this should be updated at each annual review or sooner as new information becomes known outside of this. If outside of the annual review this information can be added to Addendum to PAR document.

* **Unannounced visits**

An unannounced visit must be completed within 12 months for a foster carer thus any Early Permanence carers must have had at least one unannounced visit if the placement continues under the fostering regulations for 12 months.

# References

* **Wider family and friends; Network meetings and references**

A family and friends support network meeting is held in stage 2 to ensure the joys and challenges of adoption are understood by significant and close others of the prospective adopters. At these it should be made clear to attendees of their role in sharing any concerns with professionals when a child is placed.

At least 3 references are sought for the approval (one family and 2 friends). At each annual review these views should be sought again to understand if original reference is still valid, any new information and also how they are coping waiting for a child or if Early permanence when a child has moved in. There may be times this is needed outside of an annual review if new information becomes known this will be recorded on Addendum to PAR document.

***The review highlights learning.***

***That the wider family and friends’ network are explicitly made aware of their responsibility to share any concerns with the local authority. Information about how they do this must be shared during the network meetings and in writing afterwards. This can also be relayed at any referee interviews verbally and in referee write up when checking accuracy of discussion with referee.***

* **Children in the household already**

As part of the approval process, we would consult with other agencies the child has a service/intervention from and educational settings. At each annual review these will contacted again for any update. If new information is known outside of this, we will contact for any update and add to the Addendum to PAR document. If a matching panel is due and the last reference from the school is over 6 months ago a new check will be sought and included on addendum to PAR document.

We also seek the views of this child as part of the assessment, support them and their parents to prepare them ready for adoption or Early Permanence and develop a relationship with them so they are able to share any worries they may have. Thus contact with this child will be frequent. A detailed understanding of the child’s view of adoption needs to occur at every annual review and outside of this if we become aware of new information, adding this to the Addendum to PAR document. If a matching panel is due and the last detailed written report of the child’s view of adoption is over 6 months ago a new report will need to be completed and included on addendum to PAR document.

***The below was made as a Local recommendation:***

***That the voice of other children in the household is sought at regular points in the assessment and placement.***

# When a Child is placed

The child’s Social Worker and in some cases Family finder or Child and Family worker will have taken time to get to know the child and develop a relationship with them. It is vital any life story work continues with the same worker as the child transitions and includes some work on this once the child moves in with their adoptive family. The child’s Social Worker also have the statutory responsibility to see the child, understand their lived experience and their voice. Other partner agencies also need to view this child as still a child in the care of a Local Authority and give sufficient weight to their time and involvement as this child is not adopted until an Adoption order is made.

**The review notes local recommendation:**

That there has been a review of visits to children in adoption placements to ensure that **those with allocated responsibility for the child visit the child in placement at least in line with statutory requirements, and more often when there are concerns about the viability of the placement.**

All relevant partner agencies to determine how they will ensure that all professionals are aware that children placed for adoption remain in the care of the local authority until an adoption order is made, to ensure an improved awareness of their potential vulnerabilities and the need for professional oversight.

## Grid of visiting pattern

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Week after placement** | **Childs Social worker** | **Adopter Social Worker** |
| 1 | To see child statutory visit | Contact with adopters via teams, phone call or face to face across the first week (more than one) whichever works better to ensure meaningful discussion can be had with adopters. |
| 2 | To see child statutory visit | Joint visit with Childs Social worker |
| 3 | To see child statutory visit | Visit to speak with adopters |
| 4 | To see child statutory visit | Visit to speak with adopters to include observation of them with child. |

\*Thereafter decided at each Review of placement but child must be seen by their allocated Social Worker at least 6 weekly. The first Review of Adoption Placement occurs 20 working days after child moves in then it is Buckinghamshire Children’s Service policy to hold a Review set by the IRO at three monthly intervals following this though an earlier Review can be triggered if needed.

# Review of bonding

When a prospective adopter/s presents in a way that leads to concerns about the emotional care being provided to a child, they or others raise concerns as to the developing relationship with the child there needs to be provision of timely and robust response. This could be access to an emotional health service the agency has a service level agreement with or something more structured and commissioned with a therapist setting out purpose and review. These are the times when frequency of visits to child and adopters should increase including **unannounced visits**. Also, further reviews with professional network may need to increase too.

**The review provides a local recommendation:**

That there is an appropriately timely and robust response in cases where there are concerns about bonding with a child placed for adoption.

# Summary

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Leiland-James Michael Corkill REVIEW REPORT Report Author: Nicki Pettitt notes on p17;

‘*Leiland-James died while being cared for by a couple who had been successfully assessed and who were being supported by professionals and their own network. Following his move, indicators emerged that it might not progress to be the right placement for Leiland-James, and that his longer-term emotional needs may not be met. There were no known indicators that Leiland-James was at risk of physical harm from his carers, however. What was not known at the time was that the prospective adopters had not been honest about their debt, their mental and physical health, their alcohol consumption and use of physical chastisement during the assessment, at the time of Leiland-James being matched with them or during his time living with the family. Learning has been identified that information in these areas should be robustly sought, shared, and considered. This is significant, as had the information held by First Steps and the gastroenterologist been known, along with the understanding that the prospective adopters were hiding these issues, the assessment could have better reflected the vulnerabilities and potential risks.’*

The additions to our practice as noted in this document will add further weight to managing the risks any adoptive placement comes with in order that our care experienced children are matched with adopters able to meet their needs.

**Clare Talbot, Assistant Team Manager Adoption team**

**31st Jan 2023 - To be reviewed 31st Jan 2024.**

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## References:

* Serious Case review of Leiland James Michael Corkill (2022) [Cumbria LCSPR Report - Leiland-James Michael Corkill](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/537/6683/6687/38391/38392/4476910925.pdf)
* Statutory guidance on adoption (2013) [DFE stat guidance template (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption_statutory_guidance_2013.pdf)
* National Minimum standards (2014) [Department for Education (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf)
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* Undertaking Checks and References in Fostering and Adoption assessments (2019) Paul Adams, Coram BAAF: London
* Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians (2020) Hedy Cleaver and Wendy Rose, Coram BAAF: London